

Kyodan

News Letter

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KYODAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PREPARATION COMMITTEE

In preparation for holding the long awaited Kyodan General Assembly in November, the Preparation Committee has met five times and carried on careful discussions, set the time and place of the Assembly, and published materials for discussion and debate.

On September 10th and 11th, the committee met a sixth time to discuss the issues before them. But the materials for discussion, which had been published in the Kyodan Shimpō, had been provoking sharp opinions and queries from all quarters of the church. More especially, the fifteen groups which, since the confrontation on September 1st, 1969, have been actively posing the issues surrounding the Christian Pavilion at Expo '70 and other related problems presented to the Preparation Committee and the Kyodan Executive Committee a statement entitled "A Public Posing of Questions" (Kokai Shitsumon-jo) dated September 3rd.

Representatives of these groups sought admittance to the meeting of the Preparation Committee, and, as a result, the entire meeting became an open forum for debate of the issues posed in the September 3rd document. A heated attack was made, not only on the members' understanding of the meaning of the various problems under discussion, but also on the nature and function of the Preparation Committee and its relationship to the Executive Committee.

After much discussion, Rev. Toda, chairman of the Preparation Committee, explained that he had had a plan all along, before discussions had been held between the districts whose general meeting had been suspended and the groups that had raised various issues, and said that the inadequacies of the materials prepared for the present meeting would speedily be corrected through a second presentation of material, prepared with due cognizance of the queries and criticisms that had been raised.

It was agreed, moreover, that those who had made interpellations should prepare in writing a criticism of any parts of the materials that were actually erroneous, that the Committee would thoroughly investigate these, and that there would be a public debate of the issues in both the Kansai and the Kanto areas, and, through these careful preliminary steps, preparation would be made for the General Assembly in November.

COMMENT: The issues which were central to this discussion were: the Expo '70 Christian Pavilion, the overall policy (shisei) of the Kyodan, the struggle on the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary campus, the system for ordaining ministers, the basic nature of the Kyodan, a question that has been intensified through the problem of the Tokyo District Assembly and other problems, the Confession of Faith, and the relation between the Jesus of history and Pauline theology.

No doubt, moreover, there will be continuing widespread debate, right up the General Assembly, over the propriety of holding an Assembly when the districts of Tokyo, Osaka, Hyogo and Kyoto have not yet been able to convene and elect delegates to the General Assembly.

The two public debates, planned by the Preparation Committee, will be held at the Osaka Umeda Church on October 8th and at the Kyodan Central Office in Tokyo on October 23rd.

Two districts, moreover, are planning to hold their assemblies, Kyoto district on October 10th, and Osaka District on October 22nd - 23rd.

Place and dates for the Kyodan General Assembly are Hakone Kowakien Hotel, November 20th - 23rd, 1973.

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CONSCIENCE VERSUS THE STATE - The Tanetani Case

"I refuse to pay the ¥10,000 fine."

With this declaration three years ago, Pastor Shunichi Tanetani of the Kyodan Amagasaki Church set grinding the wheels of a legal process that has run through eighteen sessions and enlisted the interest of hundreds of people who have contributed nearly 4 million yen towards his defense. Most of the sessions have been conducted in the Kobe District Court, but the case moved briefly to Tokyo last week for two days of hearing on September 10th - 11th.

The case revolves around the issues: How far does a pastor's right extend to render pastoral care to persons whom the police are trying to apprehend?

In October 1970, a high school student who attends Amagasaki Church was implicated along with a friend in the concealment of some molotov cocktails in their school. The boys were taken by the pastor to his friend, Rev. Shogo Suzuki, with the request they be given shelter and an opportunity to reflect on their actions.

When the police discovered their whereabouts ten days later, they arrested the two pastors, searched their houses, and charged them with concealment of offenders under Articles 103 and 60 of the Criminal Law. Both pastors were released, but a fine of ¥10,000 was levied against Tanetani. Deciding at first to pay it, he found he could not sleep at night, and determined to follow the signals his conscience was giving him and refuse to pay the fine, regardless of the consequences.

There have followed months of litigation in which a panel of five outstanding lawyers, two of them former judges (Eigoro Aoki and Kenkichi Nakadaira), have risen to Tanetani's defense with the sense that a vital principle is at stake.

In the recent Tokyo District Court sessions, four distinguished witness were called to the stand: Rev. Toru Takakura, president of the Japan Rural Theological Seminary and former General Secretary of the Kyodan, Prof. Shinichi Takayanagi of Tokyo University, Prof. Yoshio Inoue of Waseda University and Prof. Mitsuo Miata of Tohoku University.

The latter gave a historical resume of the relationship between religion and the state. He interpreted the Christian position as being that the state is to be obeyed as a general principle, but that it is not absolute, to be obeyed against the dictates of conscience. The state should recognize limits to its authority and respect the rights of the religious conscience. He cited Article 1 of the United States Constitutional Amendment, in which the freedom of conscience is acknowledged, and the principle that the state must neither establish an official state religion nor claim absolute authority over its citizens in every circumstance, overriding their conscientious objections. Modern states for the most part accept this principle, he affirmed.

Ther other witnesses also supported the action of the pastor in attempting to bring young offenders to a proper frame of mind through moral influence rather than through legal penalties.

The decision of the courts will set a significant precedent in the history of Japanese jurisprudence, and may well be a momentous step towards placing Japan in the ranks of those nations which recognize a higher claim than that of the state and thereby ground their ethical systems on principles transcending the laws made by a particular state.

what has been -- I N T H E K Y O D A N -- what is to be

I. Coming Events

Kyodan General Assembly scheduled 11/20-23 at Hakone Kowakien Hotel
(Shimpo 7/21, Shimbun 7/21)

Kyoto District General Assembly scheduled 10/10 (Shimpo 9/8)

Public debate meetings on issues and materials related Kyodan General
Assembly at Osaka 10/8 and Tokyo 10/23 (Shimpo 9/22)

II. Recent Events

Districts

Society Thinking About Issues of Osaka District starts 7/9 (Shimpo 8/25)

Saitama Area Church General Retreat on "New Churches of Saitama--Unity
and Development" is held 8/21-23 (Shimpo 9/8)

Tokyo Northern Sub-district elects 3 Tokyo District Assembly Prepara-
tion Committee members (Shimpo 8/25)

Education

Offering for Children of traffic accident victims by Committee on
Education at Christmas 1972 exceeds the goal ¥4,000,000. Total
¥5,920,874 (Shimpo 9/1)

Summer Laymen's Seminary is held at Tozanso on the theme of "History
and Man - The Chosen People Living in the History" 8/30-9/1 (Shimpo 9/15)

Kyodan

Rev. Tomoni Kimura, Clerk of General Assembly and Rev. R. W. Brownlee,
Kyodan Staff Secretary attend the World Methodist Council's Mission
Conference in Mexico 7/29-8/3 (Shimpo 9/8)

27th Extraordinary Executive Committee 7/10 decides to hold 17th Kyodan
General Assembly 11/20-23 at Hakone (Shimpo 7/21)

Kyodan General Assembly Preparation Comm. issues the "17th Kyodan
General Assembly discussion materials" (Shimpo 8/25 Shimbun 9/1)

Kyodan General Assembly Preparation Comm. decides to publish a second
issue of discussion materials and to hold public debate meetings in
Osaka and Tokyo (Shimpo 9/22)

Social

NCC Yasukuni Problem Special Comm. 8/6 appeals to every church for
more campaigns against Yasukuni Bill (Shimpo 8/18)

Yasukuni Problem Urgent Discussion Meeting is held by Comm. on Social
Concerns, Yasukuni Problem Special Comm. 8/12 and decides to rally
the efforts of Tokyo churches (Shimpo 8/25)

Observation of 50th anniversary of Great Kanto Earthquake and Commemo-
ration of massacre of Koreans in Japan Meeting is held at Kanda
Kyoritsu Hall 9/2, sponsored by NCC Comm. on Human Rights of Foreigners
in Japan (Shimpo 9/15, Shimbun 9/15)

18th Session of Rev. Tanetani's Trial is held 9/10-11 at Tokyo District
Court (News Letter 9/20, Shimpo 9/22, Shimbun 9/22)

Women

Miss Yuki Naito, executive secretary of the National Federation of Kyodan
Women's Societies, retired 8/31 and is succeeded by Mrs. Toshiko
Hayashi, former head of the Federation.

Rev. Miss Iseko Kawase, pastor of the Kamakura Church, is elected to
fill the post vacated by Mrs. Hayashi and began her terms as chairwoman
of the Federation in June.